

## Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSM-03 SIG-01  
SS-15 IO-13 CIAE-00 NSC-05 /080 R

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APPROVED BY INR/RNA:PHSTODDARD  
SSM:CWKONTOS  
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION  
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-----034036 160315Z /14

P 152310Z FEB 78  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

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TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 502 - FEBRUARY 15, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING  
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY  
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. THE SITUATION IN LEBANON REMAINS TENSE AND TROUBLESOME. IN A MOVE DESIGNED TO HEAD OFF A FURTHER CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN FORCES, LEBANON'S PARLIAMENT PASSED A BILL ESTABLISHING A MIXED SYRIAN-LEBANESE MILITARY TRIBUNAL TO INVESTIGATE "CRIMES AFFECTING THE INTERESTS AND SAFETY OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES (ADF) IN LEBANON." SOME GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THE MIXED TRIBUNAL CAN SUCCEED IN COOLING THE SITUATION.

2. THIS COURT, HOWEVER, MAY BE A MIXED BLESSING. IT HAS THE EFFECT OF LEGALIZING FURTHER SYRIAN INFRINGEMENT ON LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY AND MAY ANTAGONIZE LEBANESE RIGHTISTS. THE COURT, WHICH CONSISTS OF THREE ADF REPRESENTATIVES AND TWO LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS, HAS THE POWER TO TRY CIVILIANS, INCLUDING MILITIAMEN AND LEBANESE

ARMY PERSONNEL, FOR OFFENSES COMMITTED DURING THE RECENT INCIDENTS AND IN THE FUTURE. THE SYRIANS REPORTEDLY HAVE PLEDGED, HOWEVER, NOT TO PROSECUTE PEOPLE FOR OFFENSES COMMITTED LAST WEEK. THEY INITIALLY ALSO HAD DEMANDED THE POWER TO SET UP SUMMARY COURTS MARTIAL WHICH WOULD SENTENCE OFFENDERS WITHIN 24 HOURS, BUT WERE PERSUADED BY THE LEBANESE TO COMPROMISE.

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3. THE SECURITY SITUATION STILL HAS NOT RETURNED TO NORMAL. SYRIANS FIRED 40 ROUNDS OF ARTILLERY AT AYN RUMANAH LATE ON FEBRUARY 13, ACCORDING TO US DEFENSE ATTACHE SOURCES. MOREOVER, THERE WAS SMALL ARMS AND MACHINE GUN FIRE, AS WELL AS EXPLOSIONS, IN THE AYN RUMANAH/SHIYAH AREA THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT. YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, SEVEN PERSONS WERE WOUNDED BY TWO EXPLOSIONS IN CENTRAL BEIRUT.

4. THERE ARE, MOREOVER, INDICATIONS THAT THE SYRIANS AND THE LEBANESE ARMY MAY BE GEARING UP FOR A NEW ROUND OF CLASHES. THE SYRIANS HAVE REPORTEDLY ERECTED A "STEEL BARRIER" AROUND THE FAYYIDAH BARRACKS. THEY ALSO DEPLOYED TANKS, ROCKET LAUNCHERS, AND ARTILLERY.

5. OF EVEN GREATER CONCERN IS THE REDEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES IN WEST BEIRUT. SEVERAL IMPORTANT ADF ROADBLOCKS HAVE BEEN TURNED OVER TO PALESTINIANS OR LEBANESE LEFTISTS. THESE MOVES UNDOUBTEDLY WILL RAISE RIGHTIST FEARS THAT THE SYRIANS ARE ENCOURAGING THE PALESTINIANS AND THEIR ALLIES TO COME OUT OF THE CAMPS AND TO REESTABLISH CHECKPOINTS IN BEIRUT TO CONTROL

THE MOVEMENT OF LEBANESE CITIZENS. UNDER THE FIRST AND SECOND STAGES OF THE SHTAWRAH AGREEMENT, WHICH WERE IMPLEMENTED LAST SUMMER, SUCH PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES WERE PROHIBITED. THE REAPPEARANCE OF PALESTINIAN ROAD-BLOCKS WILL CONVINCE MANY LEBANESE THAT THE SYRIANS ARE IN FULL ALLIANCE WITH THE PALESTINIANS.

6. MEANWHILE, A SOURCE OF THE DEFENSE ATTACHE REPORTED THAT A GROUP "POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED" AS ISRAELIS ARE BUILDING A ROAD FROM THE BORDER FENCE TO ALMA ASH-SHAAB NEAR THE COAST IN SOUTH LEBANON. A SECOND ISRAELI GROUP IS ENGAGED IN UNKNOWN CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY JUST INSIDE SOUTH LEBANON EAST OF METULLA. OUR ATTACHE COMMENTED THAT THESE ACTIVITIES LIKELY ARE DESIGNED TO IMPROVE  
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LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE RIGHTISTS. (SECRET)

7. EGYPT. THE FOUNDER OF THE NEW, REVIVED WAFD RECENTLY TOLD EMBASSY CAIRO THAT THE PARTY DOES NOT EXPECT TO ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS AT PRESENT WITHIN PARLIAMENT. THUS, IT WOULD CONCENTRATE ITS ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE, PARTICULARLY ON RESURRECTING THE PARTY'S ORGANIZATION AND ESTABLISHING ITS OWN PUBLICATIONS. HE ADMITTED THAT HE WILL FACE SOME OPPOSITION FOR THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP, POSSIBLY INDICATING SOME TENSIONS AMONG THE PARTY'S DIFFERENT GENERATIONS. MEANWHILE, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED STORMY SESSION OF THE PEOPLES' ASSEMBLY FEBRUARY 12, A FIST FIGHT BROKE OUT BETWEEN WAFDISTS AND MEMBERS OF PRIME MINISTER SALIM'S CENTER PARTY. (CONFIDENTIAL)

8. TUNISIA. RECENT RUMORS IN TUNIS THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S HEALTH HAS SERIOUSLY DECLINED SINCE THE JANUARY 26 RIOTING ARE UNCONFIRMED AND PROBABLY EXAGGERATED. EVEN IF TUNISIA'S 74-YEAR-OLD LEADER, WHOSE HEALTH HAS BEEN POOR SINCE 1967, DIES, THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA, OR A LIKE-MINDED SUCCESSOR FROM WITHIN THE PRESENT POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT, IS LIKELY TO REMAIN IN POWER FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS. WITH THE BACKING OF ITS WESTERN AND ARAB FRIENDS, TUNISIA SEEMS ABLE TO CONTINUE TO RESIST EXTERNAL PRESSURES, ESPECIALLY FROM LIBYA, TO ADOPT AN ANTI-WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY.

9. PERHAPS THE MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO NOUIRA WILL COME FROM FIGURES WITHIN THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT WHO VIEW THE 64-YEAR-OLD PRIME MINISTER AS MERELY A CARETAKER. MAJOR INTERNAL CONTENDERS FOR POWER STILL VIEW THE PARTY/GOVERNMENT APPARATUS AS THE BEST SPRINGBOARD TO POLITICAL POWER. THEY WILL CONTINUE, AS THEY HAVE IN THE  
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PAST, TO MANEUVER BEHIND THE SCENES TO BUILD NETWORKS OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE PARTY, THE CABINET, AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

10. AT PRESENT, THE POTENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL INSURRECTION IN TUNISIA APPEARS NEGLIGIBLE, DESPITE THE BITTERNESS THE JANUARY VIOLENCE FOSTERED AMONG SOME SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY. ALTHOUGH SMALL REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS COULD TURN TO TERRORISM AND CAUSE SECURITY PROBLEMS FOR THE REGIME, THEIR ACTIVITIES WOULD NOT SERIOUSLY THREATEN THE COUNTRY'S STABILITY EVEN IF THEY OBTAINED QADHAFI'S SUPPORT.

11. REPRESSION OF DISSIDENTS OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD WOULD ERODE THE LEADERSHIP'S LEGITIMACY AND INCREASE THE RISK THAT A GROUP WITHIN THE MILITARY--POSSIBLY A RIGHTIST

CLIQUE OR A REFORM-MINDED FACTION--MIGHT TAKE CHARGE. THE LIKELIHOOD OF A COUP BY YOUNG OFFICERS ESPOUSING A QADHAFI-STYLE PROGRAM IS REMOTE, HOWEVER. WE BELIEVE THAT NOUIRA AND MOST LEADERS OF THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT RECOGNIZE THE DANGERS OF OVER-RELIANCE ON REPRESSION FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD. CONSEQUENTLY, THEY WILL PROBABLY SEEK COMPROMISE WITH OTHER MODERATE INTEREST GROUPS TO PRESERVE TUNISIA'S CIVILIAN-DOMINATED POLITICAL SYSTEM. (SECRET) VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Concepts:** INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION, MONITORING FACILITIES  
**Control Number:** n/a  
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**Draft Date:** 15 feb 1978  
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
**Disposition Event:**  
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**Executive Order:** X2  
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**To:** SINAI  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014